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# THE MONROE DOCTRINE FROM AN ENGLISH STANDPOINT.

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THE policy enunciated in President Monroe's celebrated message, commonly known as "the Monroe Doctrine," to which special attention has been called by the Venezuela imbroglio, has been the subject of considerable misapprehension on both sides of the Atlantic, though in different directions. On the one hand, we hear declarations that this or that Power—notably Great Britain—has or has not assented to the doctrine; as though it were a maxim of International Law,—such as the right of issuing Letters of Marque in war-time,—and, as such, matter for formal acceptance or rejection on the part of independent civilized nations. On the other hand, there has been suggested a course of action on the part of the United States, which could be justified only if, by the promulgation of the doctrine in question, they had constituted themselves the protectors, and undertaken to act as the police, of the whole Western Hemisphere—a position untenable in itself, and expressly repudiated by the Government of the United States.

Looked at dispassionately, the so-called "doctrine" is neither more nor less than a public announcement by the Government and People of the United States, that they would look upon any attempt at territorial aggrandizement in any part of the American continent, by any European Power, as "an unfriendly act," an act which they would resent under any circumstances, and would be ready, if necessary, to prevent by armed force. Such an announcement it is clearly within the right of every nation to make, on any question which it considers—and it is itself the sole judge—to warrant it; it may be likened to the hanging up of his

shield by a knight in one of the mediæval romances, as a warning to all-comers, with Lord Marmion's motto displayed beneath, "Who checks at me to death is dight." An exact parallel to this announcement was the declaration of Great Britain in respect of the Nile Valley, a declaration which could only be disregarded at the risk of war, and which therefore was not likely to be disregarded without serious consideration. And, just as it is within the prerogative of every independent Power to make such an announcement, in any case which it considers of sufficient importance in its own interests, so it is manifestly immaterial whether any other nation has or has not signified its assent to or dissent from it. It may be repudiated in words: but it cannot be disregarded in act by any Power not prepared to face the consequences. The Fashoda incident, and the French invasion of Mexico, are instances directly in point.

After the exhaustive history of the "rise and progress" of the doctrine which has lately appeared from the pen of Captain Mahan,\* it would be superfluous, as well as presumptuous, to enter here on any account of its origin and development. Suffice it to say, that the original declaration sprang from a well-grounded apprehension of the effects upon the United States themselves of a re-conquest of the revolted Spanish Colonies by a European combination; that this apprehension was shared in and sympathized with by Great Britain; and that the principle involved has been completely vindicated by subsequent events. It may well be that sympathy with the aspirations of young and struggling republics had something to do with the ready acceptance which the President's message met with from the American public, and that, if the newly emancipated colonies had adopted—as Brazil did on its separation from Portugal—monarchical institutions, their claim to independence might not have met with so hearty a response. But the underlying principle would not have been thereby affected; the true ground, and the sole tenable ground, for the position taken up by the United States was the conviction that it was inconsistent with their national interests to allow the American continent to become the battle-ground of European ambition—so inconsistent that war, with all its eventualities, was deemed to be preferable. There was nothing Quixotic about the policy: sentiment, so far as it entered into the question

\* *National Review*, February, 1903.

at all, played a very subordinate part. That, under the circumstances of 1823, this conviction was well-founded; that, if the Holy Alliance, then at the height of its influence, had acquired a foothold in Mexico or Central America, (and, if established in any part of the continent, it might have been difficult or impracticable to set limits to its sphere of influence), its efforts would have been directed to impeding, even if they could not altogether prevent, that westward expansion which has been of such transcendent importance to both the United States and Canada—is unquestioned. Doubtless, the circumstances are somewhat altered now. The United States have ceased to be “a local celebrity,” and have taken their place as a World-Power; and considerations of vital moment to a federation of States clustered along the eastern seaboard of North America, might well be disregarded with impunity by a united nation more than five times as numerous, the owners of nearly half the continent in point of area, and much more than half in point of population. Moreover, it is open to question whether the segregation of interest implied in the policy in question is consistent with the position of a nation owning extensive colonies in the Philippine and Sandwich Islands, and the principal, perhaps even the predominant, power in the Northern Pacific. That, however, is a question for the American people themselves. They are the sole guardians of their own dignity, the sole judges of their own interests; and if they think it consistent with their place in the family of civilized nations to treat the South-American continent as within their exclusive “sphere of influence,” they are not merely within their right in so doing, but it is a right which it could hardly be, under any probable circumstances, the interest of any other nation seriously to contest.

But there have come across the sea, not now for the first time, suggestions that it is the part of the United States, when disputes have arisen between a European and an American Power, to assume the rôle of arbitrator, to investigate and give judgment uninvited upon the merits of the quarrel, and to require the contending parties to acquiesce in the decision. This is an assumption of a totally different nature, an assumption which, although it may shelter itself under the *name* of the Monroe Doctrine, is entirely foreign to its *principle*. Now, such an assumption, if seriously put into practice, would inevitably end in war. No self-

respecting nation would or could submit to dictation of that description till compelled by armed force. No nation—least of all a democratically governed nation—will be ruled by its material interests when its *amour propre* is rudely assailed. Rather than so submit, Denmark dared the contest with the German Federation, a contest in which failure was a foregone conclusion, but which was necessary to render the result compatible with the maintenance of her self-respect. Even so feeble a Power as Spain entered upon a hopeless struggle with the United States rather than terminate, at their demand, a contest which was exhausting her resources, and wearing out her strength. The patience and self-restraint of a great nation, conscious of its own strength, and with a fixed determination not to take needless offence, enabled Great Britain to pass lightly over President Cleveland's amazing message to Congress, and Mr. Olney's hectoring despatch; but had there been any attempt to transmute words into action, neither the insignificance of the question at issue, nor the passionate desire of the people of Great Britain for the friendship of the United States, would have been sufficient to prevent a collision, the evil effects of which, whether it eventuated in actual hostilities or not, would have been felt in both countries for generations. It is matter for earnest thankfulness that vaporings of this sort have never been seriously acted on by any responsible authority; and that, with the single exception above mentioned, the official interpretation of the doctrine by the United States Government has been uniformly unexceptionable. *Esto perpetua!*

There are, however, certain contingencies, not perhaps very likely to occur, but not beyond the range of practical politics, in which the right application of the doctrine would require anxious consideration.

Wherever a civilized Power finds its territory conterminous with that of a semi-civilized one, all history shows that causes of quarrel are certain to arise, always from aggressions on the part of the latter, which can only be put an end to by a more or less veiled process of annexation. The extensions of Roman authority in Gaul and Germany, the gradual, and in great part unwilling, enlargement of the borders of British India, and, above all, the enforced advance of Russia in Central Asia, are all instances of this inevitable evolution. The westward progress of the United States themselves was partly due to the operation of similar

causes. Now, the existing governments of the South-American republics are, with immaterial exceptions, so far of this nature that they cannot be depended upon to restrain their own citizens; and the more settled communities in their neighborhood can never be perfectly secured against unprovoked aggression and annoyance, aggression and annoyance necessarily calling for reprisals, and which might in certain possible events be remediable only by the supersession of the government of the offenders. Let us suppose such a state of relations to exist between the French colony of Cayenne and the neighboring districts of Brazil—over which the control of the government at Rio Janeiro is often merely nominal. The French authorities might very possibly find themselves entitled and obliged to apply to the United States the words of Aias to Odysseus,

ἤ μ' ἀνάειρ, ἢ ἐγὼ σέ.\*

“Either take these people in hand yourselves, or let us do so in our own way.” And the United States would be logically bound, in accordance as well with the dictates of international courtesy as the principle of the Monroe Doctrine itself, as authoritatively interpreted, either to acquiesce in the second alternative, or to assume a responsibility for the conduct of the supposed Brazilian marauders to which they were in no wise bound, and which they have always consistently repudiated. Which of these two courses they might choose to adopt in the imagined contingency would be matter for their consideration under the particular circumstances, but the validity and applicability of the Monroe Doctrine would remain unaffected in either event.

Again, the Dominion of Canada, in its relation to this doctrine, is an American, not a European, Power. The need of Canada at present is, and will probably be for many years to come, population not territory, immigrants not emigration; but that is a condition which can hardly, in the nature of things, be permanent. The country is filling up fast, not only by an annual influx reckoned in tens of thousands, but by the excess of births over deaths natural in a peaceful and prolific community; and a day will assuredly come, when a nation of from sixty to seventy millions will find even the expanse of British North America “too strait for” them, and will send forth their surplus population, as their fathers did before them, to seek “fresh woods and pastures new,”

\* Homer, *Iliad*, xxiii., 724.

wherever they can be found in the unsettled or half-peopled parts of the globe. It is in this manner that the waste places of the earth are subdued to the use of man; it is this spirit which has carried the people of the United States themselves from the Alleghanies to the Rockies, from the Rockies to the Pacific, dispossessing Indian and Mexican alike, and which will inevitably carry them further afield also, as soon as the pressure of a steadily increasing population has begun to make itself felt. But before that day can arrive, we may reasonably expect that the common sense and mutual courtesy of the peoples concerned will have moulded the then prevailing policy into a shape consistent, not merely with the interests, but even the susceptibilities, of the two great nations whose co-operation will control, whose collision would destroy, the future of the western world.

In the mean time, it is well to recognize unreservedly that the operation of the doctrine in question, as explained, not by vaporings of newspaper writers in the one country or by the cavillings of amateur critics in the other, but by the deliberate utterances of responsible authority, is a doctrine that makes for peace and progress, if for no other reason than because it tends to preserve a valuable heritage against the time to come from the strivings of ambition and the intrigues of diplomacy. Whoever else may be inclined to quarrel with it, it is unquestionably to the interest of Canada, and therefore of Great Britain, to uphold it in its entirety.

ALEX. EDW. MILLER.